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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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May 5, 2005

To: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
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Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: David Sanders, Ph.D. 
Director

EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMAND POST

Attached is a report completed by staff of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) with recommendations to decrease the number of children who wait for placements at the Emergency Response Command Post (ERCP). It is our intent to implement these and other actions to assure that children don't wait in our facility prior to placement. We have begun the recruitment of foster homes identified in Recommendation Number 9 and expect this alternative to be in place within six weeks.

Our ERCP is located at 3075 Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles and provides overnight and weekend coverage for DCFS. Youth up to age 21 are brought to the ERCP by law enforcement or after being discharged prematurely by group homes or foster families. Command Post staff attempt to identify appropriate resources as quickly as possible and facilitate placement in those resources. In most cases, youth are placed appropriately and the vast majority do not return to the Command Post.

However, a small percentage of youth, generally ages 15-20 and predominantly female, present with a history of behavioral or emotional issues that present challenges to Command Post staff in locating an appropriate placement quickly. Foster homes and group homes refuse to accept these youth because of their age or history of acting out; and return to their biological families is inappropriate. These youth may wait for ten hours or more in the Command Post. There were a total of 61 youth who waited for ten hours or more at the Command Post from January to October 2004, an average of six per month. The total from November 2004 through March 2005 was 70, an average of 14 per month.

The attached document includes more detail including recommendations for reducing this population and more quickly identifying appropriate placement settings for these youth.

Each Supervisor
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If you have additional questions please contact me, or your staff may contact Helen Berberian, Board Relations Manager at (213) 351-5530.

DS:mdd

Attachment

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisor

EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMAND POST

"OVERSTAY" WORKGROUP REPORT

April 15, 2005

EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMAND POST OVERSTAY WORKGROUP REPORT

Summary

In January, 2005 a workgroup under the auspices of Deputy Director Russ Carr was established to review and make recommendations regarding "overstays" at the Emergency Response Command Post (ERCP). The workgroup, comprised of twelve departmental employees and one graduate intern, met on January 17, 2005, March 3, 2005 and April 7, 2005. Additionally, subgroups of this workgroup met to review specific information involving girls 13 to 18, boys 13 to 18 and children with special needs (i.e., medically fragile, deaf, etc.). The membership of this workgroup brought to the table a combined total of over 280 years of departmental experience, representation from all of the Bureau of the Department and work assignments ranging from Children's Services Worker to Division Chief/Regional Administrator.

As a result of the workgroup's efforts a total of twenty-two (22) recommendations are being made to the Executive Committee for consideration. These recommendations fall into three broad categories: Placement Resources, Organizational Changes and Best Practices.

The workgroup expresses its thanks to the Executive Committee and especially to former Deputy Director Russ Carr for the opportunity to review the "overstay" situation at the ERCP and to offer recommendations for review and discussion. The workgroup's participants are available to provide an oral presentation and to answer questions which may arise.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the closure of MacLaren Children's Center (MCC) in March, 2003 it was clearly understood that situations would occur whereby some youngsters would need to be maintained while an appropriate placement was located. The general view was that in most cases a placement could be found within 8 hours while, in a very few cases, a placement could be made within 23 hours. At that time discussions were held and an overall plan was developed to establish between 4 and 8 "23 Hour Reception Centers" throughout the County to accommodate this population of youngsters. Unfortunately, this critically important plan was never implemented. However, in order to support the ERCP operation, it was decided to assign 20 Group Supervisor staff (displaced by the closure of MCC) to the ERCP. The fully loaded cost of one Group Supervisor is \$68,061.60 (total of \$1,361,239.60).

From March, 2003 through December, 2003 a total of 108 youngsters stayed at the ERCP for four (4) or more hours. From January, 2004 through December,

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2004 the total number had risen to 204. In the first three months of this year the total number of youngsters has been 117. At this rate it is quite conceivable that over 400 youngsters will remain at the ERCP for over four hours.

In reviewing the length of time that youngsters have remained at the ERCP awaiting placement the workgroup has noted that 31% (115) were placed within 8 hours, 28% (104) were placed within 10 hours, 25% (91) were placed within 15 hours and 15% (51) required 16 or more hours to locate a placement. Additionally, of the 245 admissions between March, 2003 through October, 2004 only 34 youngsters had repeat admissions. In essence, 211 youngsters did not return to the ERCP and stay there for more than 4 hours.

A breakdown of these 211 youngsters showed that 127 were female and 84 were male, 154 (75%) had active DCFS cases while 57 (25%) were new to the Department. The largest category was between 13 to 18 years of age (147) while the 12 and under age group accounted for only 38 children. The single largest age/gender group were 15-year-old females (30). Although accounting for only 20 youngsters, the most challenging and difficult to place were youngsters 18 to 20 years of age.

Based upon the workgroup's review of the 211 youngsters who had open DCFS cases, there appeared to be no specific patterns relative to areas of the County where these youngsters resided. Services Bureau 1 had 45 youngsters, Services Bureau 2 had 54 youngsters, Services Bureau 3 had 44 youngsters and Specialized Programs has 7 youngsters. This fact, combined with histories obtained regarding these youngsters, persuaded the workgroup to view this population as a distinct "sub-set" of the overall Department's child population. In view of this it was decided to maintain the workgroup's focus on this specific population and not to join with other workgroups currently working in the Department.

On a final note, the workgroup was impressed with the irony that while the numbers at the ERCP have increased since March, 2003 the group home population has decreased from 2204 in March, 2003 to 1881 in February, 2005. Also, the out-of-home care population has decreased from 25,296 (excludes legal guardianship cases) in April, 2004 to 23,634 as of March 28, 2005 and the over 2 years in out-of-home care population has also decreased from 16,691 in April, 2004 to 13,088 as of March 28, 2005. Based on these decreases it would seem to logically follow to assume that additional capacity should exist within the County to accommodate this ERCP population.

II. METHODOLOGY

In view of the data indicated above, the workgroup decided to establish three subgroups to review the 13 to 18 year old girls, the 13 to 18 year old boys and the youngsters with special needs. The subgroups reviewed these children's histories, written responses from CSWs to the "EXTENDED STAY AT ERCP FACT SHEET QUESTIONNAIRE," developed a new questionnaire and went back to the assigned CSWs with this new questionnaire. The subgroups were able to have questionnaires completed on a total of 84 of the 147 youngsters who were in these selected age groups (SB 1 - 28, SB 2 - 33, SB 3 - 16 and Specialized Programs - 7).

The workgroup also attempted to secure current reports which would identify group home capacity, vacancies and overall usage (admission rates, rejection rates, discharge rates and non-readmission rates). Unfortunately, there appears to be no reports to track group home vacancies and overall performance.

Finally, based on review of the "EXTENDED STAY QUESTIONNAIRES," CSWs reported that in only 23 cases of the 115 cases studied was a 7-day notice provided to them.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The workgroup is making the following recommendations:

Placement Resources

1. Redefine an "overstay" at the ERCP as 8 or more hours rather than 4 or more hours. The expectation for placement timeliness should be consistent with the expectation in regional offices.
2. Utilize Hollygrove to serve M/F 13 to 18 year olds who "overstay" (8 or more hours) at the ERCP as indicated on page number two of the March 22, 2005 letter to the Board of Supervisors. Since this population is clearly the population for whom these types of services are "most needed", do not "accommodate" group home refusals to provide services to this age group with an agreement for them to serve a younger aged population. Survey current group home providers (providing financial incentives as necessary) for similar settings in the northern, southern, eastern and western areas of the County.

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3. In those situations where a youngsters "history" seems to match the program descriptions of a specific group home and that group home either rejects or discharges that youngster, secure a written explanation from that group home regarding the basis for their decision.
4. Encourage and, if necessary, facilitate group home association networking to pool their collective resources to locate appropriate placements for youngsters.
5. Assess the potential impact of pending legislation (AB 129) regarding Probation Department usage of the Department's overall placement resources. This legislation was signed into law on September 10, 2005. It authorizes a County's Probation Department and Child Welfare Department to create a dual status protocol for a minor who is both a dependent child and a ward of the Juvenile Court.
6. In those instances where a youngster is transported from a regional office to the ERCP or from the ERCP to a regional office, demand that the "sending" operation provide the "receiving" operation with a detailed printout of all attempted placements to avoid duplication of effort.
7. Encourage (possibly with financial incentives) group homes to establish 24/7 intake operations.
8. Establish a workgroup under the auspices of Emancipation Services to review and make recommendations regarding placement strategies for 18-20 year old youngsters.
9. Develop specialized therapeutic homes limited to two-bed capacity to meet the challenging specialized needs of the children. Provide a higher rate for caregivers with specialized expertise in meeting the specialized population (runaways, children with oppositional defiant behavior, medically fragile/acting out behavior, children with mental health issues, etc.)
10. Develop a Home Connection Model: recruitment of foster homes from faith based community who will act as mentor/role model for children. The homes should be limited to one or two children who are willing to embrace children in need of a "family."

11. Relative homes if/when located, should be provided with extensive services in meeting the children's challenging needs. (Client/family centered services: such as extensive family therapy, available family resources for funding needs, linked resources to Community Family Resource Network, etc.)
12. Develop resource agencies accessible 24/7 with foster caregivers committed to work with medically fragile children, runaways, deaf/hearing-impaired children, language/cultural sensitivity and other children with specialized-challenging needs. Provide a higher specialized payment rate incentives for the foster care providers.
13. In the recruitment effort to provide homes to our children with specialized-challenging needs, **COMMITMENT, MOTIVATION AND INCENTIVES** are the viable elements for the success of the placements.
14. Explore utilization of Proposition 63 funds/ESDPT funds/Special Program funds - \$7.1m to provide innovative assessment/treatment services such as the Treatment Foster Care Model.
15. Recognizing the reality that many 17 to 20 year olds have, in fact, emancipated themselves, work with the Juvenile Court to determine if "flexibility" is possible in selecting placements.

Organizational Changes

16. Explore reinstating direct services to out-of-home care providers with DMH/DCFS Crisis Teams providing crisis intervention services to stabilize placements.
17. Explore re-establishment of a centralized placement function (Vacancy Control) staffed by full-time placement specialists which operates 24/7 (Services Bureaus or Bureau of Resources).
18. Identify a "placement Czar" to monitor group home acceptance, rejection, discharge and re-admittance performance.
19. Develop an automated report (weekly/bi-monthly/monthly) that tracks group home vacancies, capacity and usage.

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Best Practices

20. Mandate regional offices to identify and collaborate with all community partners to enhance services to children and families.
21. Streamline existing supportive services to children and families such as TDM, FGDM, SOC, WRAPAROUND, MAT, RPRT's, PERMANENCY TEAMS and RAPP to ensure that the best placement decisions are made.
22. Expand usage of TDM.

Respectfully submitted,

ERCP "Overstay" Workgroup

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Attached references:

Attachment I - ERCP 4 Hour Log Monthly Report (March, 2003 – October, 2004)
Attachment II - Analysis of ERCP 4 Hour Reports
Attachment III - Extended Stay at ERCP Fact Sheet
Attachment IV - Questionnaire on Open Cases at ERCP
Attachment V - Children in Out-of-Home Care
Attachment VI - GH Placement Court Report
Attachment VII - R-12 Vacancy Report
Attachment VIII - Treatment Foster Care Model
Attachment IX - Board Letter of March 22, 2005 (Hollygrove)